

The
THOREAU
SOCIETY
BULLETIN

BULLETIN FIFTY-FIVE

SPRING, 1956

THE ANNUAL MEETING . . .

The 1956 annual meeting of the Thoreau Society will be held at the First Parish Church in Concord, Mass., on Saturday, July 14th, at 10:30 a.m. Prof. Herbert F. West will deliver the presidential address on "Thoreau and the Younger Generation" and Prof. Kenneth A. Robinson of Dartmouth College will speak on "Thoreau and the Wild Appetite."

Luncheon will be served at 1 p.m., at a moderate price, at a place to be announced. In the afternoon a special tour of Ralph Waldo Emerson's home (admission 25¢) has been arranged. The remainder of the week-end will be devoted to informal walks and discussions.

WALLACE B. CONANT RW

Wallace B. Conant, a charter member of the Thoreau Society and director from its beginning, died at his home in Concord on February 21.

An independent thinker and inventive genius, he had lived several lifetimes during his almost eighty years. An editor, printer and publisher, an importer and dealer in steel, inventor and manufacturer of a loading machine, owner and developer of real estate, and compiler of a simplified Bible, he was working in recent years on a phonetic alphabet such as George Bernard Shaw envisioned.

The society will miss his hospitality, his keen interest in Thoreau, and the practical help he could always be counted on to give at the annual meetings.

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS . . .

As this bulletin goes to press, we have just received word from the chairman of the nominating committee that their report is not ready. Thus it will have to be made at the annual meeting and the election of officers held there.

ANNUAL DUES

With this issue most annual memberships in the society expire. If this paragraph is marked with red crayon, your membership has expired. Dues (one dollar per year or twenty-five dollars for life membership) should be sent to Walter Harding, 505 Cabell Hall, Charlottesville, Va., or paid at the annual meeting.

Viola C. White: An Appreciation

Since 1933 Dr. Viola C. White has been Curator of the Abernethy Library of American literature at Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont. She retires in June after twenty-three years of service and these years are not measurable in any terms recognized by the counting-house.

I distinctly remember the vita that introduced her to us. She had a brilliant undergraduate record at Wellesley College and later, under the guidance of Dr. Ralph L. Rusk, she took her Master's of Art degree at Columbia University. She completed her study years at the University of North Carolina, writing her doctoral dissertation on "The Symbolism of Herman Melville," under the direction of Dr. Gregory L. Paine.

There were other significant items in the vita. Her book Horizons had been one of the first volumes selected in the series of Young Yale Poets, and she had published essays in The Atlantic Monthly. It was an imposing scholarly and literary record. Moreover, it was an interesting record of vocational activity. As secretary at the Dennison House College Settlement in Boston, she had acquired experience in social work. She served as secretary of the Forward Magazine in Boston, and also as secretary of the Socialist Review, published by the Socialist Society in New York City, during the closing years of World War I. From 1923 to 1931 she was attached to the staff of the Brownsville Library in Brooklyn.

When she left Brooklyn for Vermont it must have been with a wrench. Good theatre and the abundant cultural opportunities of a city no small Vermont town could possibly offer. But the compensations in natural beauty were sizeable ones. In spite of a satirical demurrer she found Middlebury a favorable locality where she has lived without sacrificing her zest for either life or writing. "My job," she once wrote, "is far and away more interesting and congenial than most people's, yet to sit in one chair all day from 8:30 to 5:00 like a petrified penguin on a petrified egg--is this the summit of civilization's long ascent? The Pueblo Indians know better than this." The Pueblo Indians do know better and so does Dr. White. Awareness of the possibility of stultification has undoubtedly helped to save her from such a fate. No one of whom I know is more mentally awake than she. Her flow of ideas, ready play of humor and wit, and responsive friendliness are constants. During the eight-hour stretch in the Library, she has done her job as only a scholar true and trained could do it. A searching look around the Abernethy Library will show the discriminating observer the value of order, the importance of intelligence in making acquisitions, the patent results of performance of duty.

In a world that tends to be undirectedly active, we certainly should stop now and again to honor the custodians and conservers of our heritage. Theirs is a

quiet, unspectacular and often unacknowledged dedication. Dr. White has kept one aim steadily in mind; she has purchased and stocked the Abernethy Library with those books and manuscripts which enhance the value of the Collection "both from the collector's viewpoint and the literary." Nor has she neglected the student who is, of course, the core of a liberal arts college. The 1940 Check-list--and the acquisitions of the last fifteen years--are pretty sound testimony to the excellence of her curatorship.

To prove beyond cavil that her reference to the petrified penguin is not to be taken seriously, you would have to see Dr. White at work on Operation Middlebury. She is one of the walkingest women I have ever known, and walking signifies the other side of her temperament: the creatively and imaginatively active. In the small town, beautifully located in a valley with the forward wall of the Green Mountains three miles to the east, she is the genius loci. People, farmers, flowers, terrain, creatures--all have been under her intimately reflective, unpatronizingly amused and genuinely poetic surveillance. They have released a deep vein of natural poetry in her which runs as strong and untiring as sap in one of our sugar maples on a sunbright mid-March day after a night edged with cold. "I wish someone would pay me for doing nothing except appreciate Nature," she once remarked. "There ought to be at least one official appreciator for every ten square miles." She has been paid but not, as we have said, in counting-house terms; and, in a sense, she is "our official appreciator." Read the journal of a year in Middlebury, Not Faster Than a Walk, published by the Middlebury College Press in 1939, and you will see for yourself. She walks in the spirit of Henry Thoreau--not for exercise, but sauntering toward the Holy-land of the spirit.

For many years, although not now with quite the early gusto and endurance, Dr. White kept track of what was happening nature-wise in our region--on Chipman Hill, in the West Wood, at the Ledges, by the Three-Mile Bridge, and even at Bread Loaf, which is twelve miles up in the mountains. Her walks are her adventures. "Here in Middlebury as nowhere else," she says, "I have begun to realize what living with Nature around one means--to see the arbor vitae in shabby winter dress, the cracks in the ground made by the drought, the fine white sand at the creek-edge brought by the flood. To know bittersweet and baneberry in flower and in fruit. To have stood on the hill slope in March when the wind was battering down the sumach, and now to see it still flattened in the late summer time. To cower and fear that the house roof is coming off in the same February storm that uproots beeches and pines on Chipman Hill. To realize, in short, that the same forces which rule the outer world rule the human." On a late Octo-

ber walk she counts thirty-seven different plants still blossoming. In December she explores matted wet leaves and finds green growing plants like cinquefoil, Herb Robert, violet, saxifrage. She takes delight in rainy days, for they are fern-digging days; and rejoices in days of marvelous clear light that are "semi-mythical." A certain kind of cloud is a "July cloud." The weather she likes best soaks her with summer dew and dries her off by summer heat. Sometimes she rises at four and walks into the dawn, or, after library hours, she walks in the waning light, into evening and moon-up. The world of nature is alive to her; it is full of analogies, as it usually is to the poet. The orchid Habenaria Lacera looks like Shaw--"white beard and two little horns." The gaunt, bony pileated woodpecker resembles Abraham Lincoln.

She has had her full share of "nature favors," as Robert Frost calls them. What is more to the point she can communicate the feeling they evoke. "The birds fly in flocks, as though waves of air lifted and lowered them again." "Scared up three partridges. These birds always go when they go, leaving a vacuum of amazement in the air behind them...." "A brilliant light like April's, wind sounding in the foliage so that the waterfall I was in search of became quite inaudible, and the silver poplar blew with the radiance of a spring cloud." "I wonder whether ... the foliage of Dutchman's breeches is really colder to the touch than say, shadblush? It seemed to me it was, as though the wind of the rock had breathed on it." "Again, on the Chipman Hill path at twilight a snake rears its head and slides away, and at precisely the same moment the dead leaves raise themselves into the air as if the path's hair bristled on its neck." Or, when a truck load of pine trunks passes her in the twilight, she looks up and sees how "the smooth yellow circles of their ends looked fantastically like Mongolian faces as the truck disappeared."

Thoreau rejoiced that there were owls. I rejoice that there are poets, for when they are about you can always be sure to get poetry from an otherwise commonplace occasion. Dr. White is such a poet whether she is describing the wind on Chipman Hill, a bloodroot coming through the ground, or how it feels on returning from a walk to pass a diner where two friends are inside eating and to establish rapport by a wave of the hand. "I have passed lighted windows always with fascination, often with sadness. The sudden waving of hands from inside established momentarily my kinship with the warm, radiant world within."

In the little office that adjoins the Abernethy wing, where Rockwell Kent's 'Mount Equinox' hangs from one wall and Whittier's mounted letter on the derivation of 'Quaker' from another, and where the essential books for the curator of a

very important library in our literature are handy in a built-in bookcase, and where the big safe to hold the many special treasures occupies a prominent place--here for twenty-three years, quite as much in the world of weather and plants, stars and dew, July clouds and kames, Dr. White belongs.

--R.L.Cook.

JOTTINGS

John C. Broderick read a paper on "Some New Light on Henry Thoreau, Taxpayer" at the meeting of the South-Central Modern Language Association at Austin, Tex., on October 28, 1955.

Seven Gables Bookshop of New York City recently issued a 7-page catalog completely devoted to Thoreauiana. (Unfortunately their supply of the catalog is now exhausted.)

Maxwell Hunley of Beverly Hills, Calif., listed in a recent catalog Ellery Channing's personal copy of CAPE COD with his penciled notes, and a copy of EXCURSIONS with an unpublished letter from HDT to William A. Wilson of July 30, 1859, tipped in.

Robert Wild, 17 Colvin Rd., Newtonville, Mass., writes that his statuettes of Thoreau (depicted in Bulletin 33) now sell for \$12.

The cost of printing this bulletin was covered by the life membership of Mr. John Tobin of Pasadena, Calif.

A character in the recent movie ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS quotes from Thoreau!

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . WH

BALTIMORE SUN. "From Walden Pond to Montgomery, Ala." Feb. 29, 1956. Editorial on use of civil disobedience in the South today.

Besant, Walter. THE EULOGY OF RICHARD JEFFERIES. London: Longmans, 1888. p. 221f. A comparison of HDT and Jefferies.

Bode, Carl. THE AMERICAN LYCEUM. New York: Oxford, 1956. 275pp. \$5.00. With Prof. Bode's new volume we have the first comprehensive picture of the American Lyceum movement of the pre-Civil War era. Because it gives a broad over-all picture of the movement, there is comparatively little specific detail about Thoreau's part. But the book as a whole will prove important to anyone who wants to understand the background of Thoreau's lecturing career.

----- "Thoreau, with Advice." AMERICAN LITERATURE, XXVIII (March, 1956), 77-78. First publication of HDT's letter of Jan. 19, 1860 to S. Ripley Bartlett.

BOSTON TRANSCRIPT. "The Funeral of Thoreau." Reprinted in facsimile in EMERSON SOCIETY QUARTERLY, II (1956), 16-17. From the BT of May 10, 1862.

Broderick, John C. "American Reviews of Thoreau's Posthumous Books, 1863-1866: Check List and Analysis." UNIV. OF TEXAS STUDIES IN ENGLISH, XXXIV (1955), 125-139. Lists and describes many

hitherto unnoticed reviews.

----- "Thoreau's Proposals for Legislation." AMERICAN QUARTERLY, VII (1955), 285-290. Points out that while most consider HDT an anarchist, he made many suggestions for governmental activities. [Cameron, Kenneth]. "Channing's Hymn at Thoreau's Funeral." EMERSON SOCIETY QUARTERLY, II (1956), 16-17. Facsimile reproduction of the broadside, with notes.

----- "Some Collections of Emerson Manuscripts." EMERSON SOCIETY QUARTERLY, III (1956), 1-6. A bibliography. Includes a number of MSS pertaining to HDT.

----- "Thoreau and the Folklore of Walden Pond." EMERSON SOCIETY QUARTERLY, III (1956), 10-12. HDT's sources for some of the folklore in WALDEN.

----- "Thoreau's Harvard Friends Discuss Emerson's NATURE." EMERSON SOCIETY QUARTERLY, II (1956), 8. Minutes of a Hasty Pudding Club meeting.

----- "The Whereabouts of Thoreau's Natural History Collections." EMERSON SOCIETY QUARTERLY, II (1956), 15. A census.

Condry, William. "Nature's Disciple." WISDOM, I (April, 1956), 6-9. Reprinted from his THOREAU.

Crowley, Raymond J. "Thoreau Proposed 'Passive Resistance!'" RICHMOND TIMES DISPATCH. Feb. 27, 1956. Points out irony that both whites and Negroes are using HDT's civil disobedience in the segregation controversy. Reprinted in NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, March 4, 1956 and many other papers.

Downs, Robert B. "Individual versus State" in BOOKS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD. New York: Mentor, 1956. pp. 65-75. The influence of "Civil Disobedience." Also issued in hardcovers by the American Library Association.

Fadiman, Clifton. "Alimentary." NEW YORKER. May 5, 1956. p. 37. A poem. Gardner, Isabella. "To Thoreau on Re-reading Walden." YALE REVIEW, XLV (Sept. 1955), 123. A poem.

Harding, Walter. "The Influence of Thoreau's Lecturing upon His Writing." BULLETIN OF NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, LX (February, 1956), 74-80. Comparison of lecture and book versions of A WEEK.

Hough, Henry Beetle. THOREAU OF WALDEN. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956. 275pp. \$4.00. The jacket of this latest biography of HDT announces that "detailed critical studies and exhaustive interpretations [of HDT]...have made the ordinary reader feel shut out and left behind" and that this new study "offers an earthy, everyday approach to a fascinating and significant American figure." In other words, Mr. Hough intends to offer an introduction to Thoreau for the layman. In many respects he succeeds. His book is highly readable. He does get close to the character of Thoreau. He flavors his book with a large number of direct quotations from Thoreau's writings. And he enlightens it with many anecdotes. To that extent the book certainly serves its purpose.

But unfortunately there are negative

criticisms that must be made. First, there are many errors. For example, on p.93, he gives the date of John Thoreau's death as Feb. rather than Jan., 1842. On p. 100 (& p.113), he calls J.L.O'Sullivan, O'Donnell. On p. 131, he states the Walden cabin had one window instead of one on each side. On p. 166 he has HDT taking the railroad from Cohasset to Bridgewater, when no such railroad exists. On p. 194, he states the second "edition" of WALDEN came out in 1863 instead of 1862. On p.213, he states Cholmondeley sent Thoreau 24 Indian books rather than 44. On p. 243, he states HDT sent word of his Brown lecture to Sanborn rather than the Republican committee. On p.245, he states Sanborn did not attend the Brown memorial meeting, but Sanborn in his RECOLLECTIONS says he did. On p. 66, he states HDT commenced his journal at Emerson's suggestion, but on p. 55 he states Emerson did not meet Thoreau until after the journal was started. On p. 92, he states Channing moved to Concord in 1841, but on p. 114, he quotes HDT's letter of 1843 to the effect that Channing had just then moved to Concord. It is only fair to state that some of these errors have been made by other biographers and Mr. Hough simply repeated them. Nonetheless they are errors.

Second, he has not taken advantage of many recent studies. For example, articles by Adams and McGill would have given him a more accurate account of HDT's life at Harvard. And, if I may be so immodest, an article of my own solves the mystery of Sophia Foord he mentions on p. 155.

Finally, there are weaknesses of interpretation. On p.127 he suggests HDT went to Walden to establish a station on the underground railroad. I know of no evidence that this is true. Following Canby (although fortunately not going so far as Canby), he stresses the Lydian Emerson-Thoreau relationship and emphasizes a lack of harmony in the Emerson household to substantiate it. Again I think he is on weak ground.

I have devoted an unduly large proportion of this review to negative criticism. It is my hope that many of the book's errors can be corrected in later editions. For, despite all my criticism, the book has distinct values. He does present a highly readable biography and above all he shows his understanding of HDT's personality--which is a great deal more than can be claimed for some earlier biographers. WH.

----- The Same. Reviews: Alfred Ames, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, April 22, 1956; Louis Halle, SAT. REV., XXXIX (April 14, 1956), 27; Don Keister, CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER, April 22, 1956; Charles Poore, NEW YORK TIMES, April 5, 1956; F.F.Van de Water, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, April 8, 1956. Jones, Joseph. "Lugubrious Lucubration." CEA CRITIC, XVIII (March, 1956), 4. Difficulty of teaching WALDEN to students with poor vocabularies. Kazin, Alfred. "The Journal of Henry David Thoreau." in THE INMOST LEAF. New York: Harcourt, 1955. pp. 103-8. Reprinted

from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE review of Thoreau's journals.

Keast, W.R. & R.E.Streeter, eds. "Materials for Analysis: The Meaning of WALDEN." In THE PROVINCE OF PROSE. New York: Harper, 1956. Reprints a portion of WALDEN and essays on HDT by Lowell, Canby, White, and Wilder.

Keyes, Langley Carleton. THOREAU: VOICE IN THE EDGELAND. Chapel Hill: Univ. of N.C. Press, 1955. 131pp. \$2.50. A sequence of 209 sonnets weaving an intellectual biography of HDT. The octaves are fashioned from HDT's own words; the sestets are Mr. Keyes' commentaries. It is interesting to see that HDT's prose can so easily be converted into poetry. But the sestets are the more rewarding for they display Mr. Keyes' keen insight into the mind of Thoreau. WH

Lewis, R.W.B. THE AMERICAN ADAM. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955. 205pp. \$5.50. One of the most thoughtful and provocative analyses of 19th century American literature in recent years. A study of the "Adamic myth," the popular belief of the time that in America man had found a new opportunity to break away from the past and begin all over again as an "innocent in paradise." Quite appropriately HDT is one of the first authors he discusses (pp. 20-27, *et passim*) and his analysis of the "re-birth" symbol in WALDEN is one of the most enlightening and convincing I have seen. He demonstrates effectively how much HDT's protest was a part of the intellectual milieu of the time.

Pulsifer, Harold Townsend. COLLECTED POEMS. Waterville, Me.: Colby College Press, 1954. A sonnet, "Thoreau," p. 35.

Whitaker, Alex. "Henry David Thoreau Comments on University Life in WALDEN." CAVALIER DAILY (Charlottesville, Va.). Feb. 17, 1955. p. 2. A series of cartoons. [I have extra copies of this and will gladly send them on request.]

Wykoff, George S. "Walden Pond 1955." CEA CRITIC. Dec. 1955. p. 7. Account of a recent visit to Walden Pond.

I am indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin: T.Bailey, J. Blotner, C.Bode, J.Broderick, R.Cochrane, E.Conant, R.Cook, J.Cooley, H.Deal, J. Garate, A.Hall, G.Hendrick, C.Hoagland, A.Hench, G.Hosmer, A.Huffert, J.Kennedy, N.Lehrman, D.Moure, E.Phillips, A.Shepperson, R.Smith, M.Swaller, A.Volkman, C. Wells, R.Wheeler, W.White, E.Wilson, and G.Wright. Please send the secretary notice of new items or ones he has missed.

The Thoreau Society, Inc., is an informal organization of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau. Its bulletins are issued quarterly; its booklets, occasionally. Annual meetings are held in Concord each July. Officers of the society are Herbert F. West (Hanover, N.H.), president; Mrs. Herbert Hosmer (Concord, Mass.), vice-president; and Walter Harding, secretary-treasurer. Annual membership in the society is one dollar; life membership, \$25.00. Communications concerning membership or publications should be addressed to WALTER HARDING, #505 CABELL HALL, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.